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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 00543

LIMDIS
DEFENSE FOR SECRETARY BROWN, ASD/ISA MCGIFFERT AND
AMBASSADOR KOMER

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: UK MPOL
SUBJECT: INCREASED UK DEFENSE SPENDING

REF: LONDON 0478

1. POL-MIL ATTACHE HAD BRIEF DISCUSSION JAN 10 WITH MULLEY ON HEELS OF HIS RETURN FROM MIDDLE EAST TRIP CONCERNING THE ABOUT TO BE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED 3 PERCENT INCREASE IN DEFENSE BUDGET FOR FIVE YEARS STARTING IN 1979/80. MULLEY WAS IN AN EBULLIENT MOOD AND COMMUNICATED HIS GREAT SATISFACTION WITH RESULTS OF VISIT TO EGYPT.

2. ON THE DEFENSE INCREASE, MULLEY SAID HE HAD TOUGH TIME DELIVERYING ON HIS DPC COMMITMENT OF LAST MAY AND OBSERVED THAT PERHAPS BATTLE "ISN'T ENTIRELY OVER YET." HE SAID LEFTWING MISCHIEF MAKERS LED BY FRANK ALLAUN AND
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SUPPORTED BY IAN MIKARDO, ERIC HEFFER AND JOAN LESTOR HAD DECIDED TO USE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF LABOUR PARTY AS MEANS FOR PRESSING A MEETING BETWEEN THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND THE CABINET. THE AIM OF THE LEFT WING IS TO RESCIND THE 3 PERCENT INCREASE BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, MULLEY THOUGHT, THEIR REAL AIM IS TO "THROW DARTS" AT THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED UK-EGYPTIAN

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DEFENSE SALES/SUPPORT ARRANGEMENT AND TO DIRTY THE WATER ON ARMS SALES ISSUES IN GENERAL BY ATTACKING THE EGYPTIAN AND EL SALVADOR DEALS. MULLEY GAVE NO FURTHER INSIGHT INTO THESE MATTERS EXCEPT TO SAY THAT LEFTWING ASSAULTS ON DEFENSE MAKE HIS LIFE IN THE CABINET UNNECCESSARILY MORE DEMANDING AND DIFFICULT. HE CLOSED CONVERSATION SAYING THE 3 PERCENT INCREASE WILL HELP TO KEEP ON-GOING PROGRAMS ON COURSE. ANY PAY INCREASE FOR THE ARMED SERVICES WILL BE TREATED AS "INFLATION" AND HENCE WILL NOT CUT INTO THE 3 PERCENT WHICH WILL GO INTO EQUIPMENT PROGRAMS.

3. COMMENT: TODAY'S QUALITY PRESS GIVES PROMINENT COVERAGE TO THE LEFT WING'S DISSATISFACTION WITH EVEN THE CURRENT LEVEL OF DEFENSE SPENDING LET ALONE THE PROPOSED 3 PERCENT INCREASE. THE GOVERNMENT WILL RESIST OPENING UP DEFENSE ISSUES FOR DEBATE BEFORE PUBLICATION OF THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER CIRCA MID-TO-END FEBRUARY AND WILL TRY TO DEFLECT LEFT WING INSISTENCE ON SEEING THE PRIME MINISTER ON HEELS OF HIS RETURN FROM ASIAN VISIT. TACTIC, ACCORDING TO SENIOR MOD OFFICIAL, ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL BE TO LET DEBATE ON DEFENSE WHITE PAPER DRAW OUT THE STEAM AND, AFTER THE VOTING (WHICH GOVERNMENT CAN HARDLY LOSE SINCE IT CAN COUNT ON CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL SUPPORT), ALLOW THE LEFTWING DEPUTATION TO SEE THE PM IF IT STILL INSISTS ON DOING SO. END COMMENT.
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4. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH MULLEY'S OFFICE, FACER TOLD POL-MIL ATTACHE MULLEY IS MOST ANXIOUS TO HAVE SECRETARY BROWN VISIT UK AS OFFICIAL GUEST EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER APRIL NPG MEETING OR MAY DPC. HE SAID SINCE INVITATION STANDS, THE BALL IS IN US COURT AND BRITISH ARE HOPEFUL EARLY DECISION TO ACCEPT WILL BE MADE SO DETAILED PLANNING CAN START.

BREWSTER

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